

Kirsti A. Korhonen

Concern about the status of the Finnish language



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Cover: Finns are called “the juniper nation”. In the picture on the cover, juniper is in the foreground. There is also a saying that “you have to see the forest for the trees”.

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The book introduces a special Teaching Granny program, which differs from the usual Reading Grandmother and -father activities.

The Reading grandmother and -father activity is an operating model based on cooperation with the school. Those who participate in the activity are only required to have ordinary citizen skills. MLL don't want to complicate the operation so that it is easy for everyone who wants to participate. By doing this, more and more children have the opportunity to get reading experiences.

The readers were interviewed after lessons, and their comments can be read at the beginning of each chapter and in the end of the book.

What have you learned in Granny's lessons?
- Well, I have learned how to read better. I have learned some stuff of different books she has gave us to read and let us have.
- I have learned reading better and writing better.

1 Foreword

Since my student days, I have been interested in social interaction and motivation. It has always been interesting to follow the various meetings and the speech that appeared in them and how people treated each other. I became interested in the private schools and tuition during my education science licentiate studies in the 2000s. I read e.g., that students who do better in school have been found to have more learning skills, such as after receiving a textbook, they first study the book by familiarizing themselves with its table of contents. Since then, a lot of research data has accumulated in these matters, and now we are talking about metacognitive skills (see e.g., Ruohotie 2000; Rahman, Yasin, Ariffin, Hayati & Yusoff 2010; Güner & Erbay 2021.) and we talk about encounters and socio-emotional skills.

This book is a description with features of the study. I map the private tuition provided as support for basic education to two students through my own experiences. The teaching periods lasted a total of 1½ years and included three periods of around ten hours: reading aloud, reading comprehension, and writing. I named it Teaching Granny -project. I try to reflect on the importance of private tuition from historical perspective moving towards a broader thinking map. The topic is interesting in Finland, where basic education is free for all students.

Literacy is the basis of learning and a prerequisite for the development of thinking. I explain the concepts related to voluntary work and teaching S2-students, as well as the basic skills of the mother tongue: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Then I introduce the Teaching Granny -project. The chapter Part 1. is about reading including the history, theories, studies, and practices of reading silent and aloud. Part 2. contains theories, listening comprehension, using reading strategies and supporting S2-pupils' reading comprehension. The information can be applied to all students. In Part 3. there are theories and studies of Writing and summary of the current situation. Part 4. is a Discussion chapter and attached are the lesson plans both in English and in Finnish, a summary how to support writing and "room boards" about good manners in Finnish society both in English and in Finnish.

The Finnish written language was born in the 16th century. It was the time of the Reformation and Bishop Mikael Agricola (1510-1557) published the first printed books in Finnish, Abckiria 1543 and Se Wsi Testamenti 1548. Salmela (2023) states that Finns

are one of the most genetically studied populations in the world. The first inhabitants arrived in Finland after the ice age more than ten thousand years ago. The Finnish language is thought to originate from the East, and the majority of what is inherited would be of Western origin. Eastern and Western Finns differ genetically. About 4.8 million people speak Finnish. There are about half a million people who speak Finnish as a second language. The Finnish language belongs to the Baltic Finnish language group of Finno-Ugric languages.

I am grateful for the opportunity to write this book. Thanks to everyone who participated.

2 About private tuition

The support provided at the Finish school is divided in three, the student can receive general, enhanced, or special support (Mikkonen, Nikander & Voutilainen 2015; the Board of Education). Individual student care includes school healthcare, psychologist and curator services and the support of a multidisciplinary expert group. It is voluntary and requires the consent of the student or, if necessary, the guardian. Support for learning and going to school does not require the consent of the student or guardian. The starting point of both forms of support is cooperation with the student and the guardian, i.e., when concerns arise, and they start planning how the student's learning and school attendance could be better supported. According to 16 § of the Basic Education Law, transitioning to enhanced and special support requires a joint multi-professional investigation by student care professionals.

Mikkonen et. al. (2015) state that early identification of developmental delays and deviations is important. In schools, a special education teacher tests, and if necessary, the student is sent for further examinations by a school psychologist. A pedagogical assessment and a learning plan are drawn up for the student. The student can be helped by structuring the things to be taught and the order, as well as by breaking down the instructions and what to do. Learning disabilities should be defined to avoid unnecessary medicalization. The difficulties of children with learning difficulties increase unless things are taught in stages (Puolimatka 2002, 84).

Which students need the S2 curriculum? According to the Board of Education in Finland, the teachers who teach the student determine the need together, and the guardian makes the decision. Guardians must get information about the goals and contents of the Finnish language and literature and Finnish as a second language and literature subjects and provide information about the student's current language skills.

2.1 About private and public schools

According to Statistics Finland, in 2022, 44,951 children were born in Finland and of which 85% were born to native language speakers. The birth rate has been decreased for ten years. Every tenth child has a foreign background. According to Wikipedia, there were 75 private schools in Finland in 2007. The school administrator must be a non-profit organization. Statistics Finland states that in 2021 there were 2,085 primary schools. In basic education were total of 547,300 students. There were 469 comprehensive schools in grades 1-9 in operation, and their number has increased in ten years. Correspondingly, the share of elementary schools has decreased. Statistical information on the number of given private lessons was not found. Sorsa (2019) states that private schools are financed by student-specific grants available from the state and municipalities and often also by donations from citizens. In the world, especially in the United States, private schools are a huge business.

Gardner (2006) considers in a global framework, should education be public or private? Society thinks about the relationship between the world of education and the market. The goal of business to make a profit is at odds with the goals of education. But the goal of education is an informed citizen who is capable of independent analysis and decisions. Societies have no longer one dominant culture, and we must deal with individuals from different backgrounds. The private school is owned by a private community. It can be taught that only well-educated, broadly, and flexibly educated people can function in the new world of the future. What should training include and how should it be achieved? The issue can be approached through two dilemmas: What should be taught? What should be emphasized in teaching? Should we emphasize art, technology, sociality, or morality? And is everyone taught everything or is the curriculum individual? Because there are too many possibilities, difficult decisions must be made. They must be based on the science of learning and our own values as people living in communities.

2.2 History of Finnish education system

In 1921, a law on compulsory education was passed. A pupil had to attend public school for six years, and after the fourth grade a pupil had the opportunity to go to grammar school. After the sixth year, a two-year civic school was completed, practical subjects were learned, and teaching was given in general education subjects. In the 1950s, there were many children in public schools in the cities, and therefore school was attended in morning and evening shifts. A quarter of the age group started grammar school. The school had a five-year middle school and a three-year high school. A pupil had to strive for a grammar school and pay for the studies. There were tuition fees and a pupil had to pay for food, textbooks, and school supplies. Some of the students had to live in

apartments and additional expenses came from housing. For many families, grammar school was too expensive, but there was an opportunity to apply for a free student place. Since 1948, the children received free school meals, before that they had managed with packed lunch. In 1948, there were 10-12% of malnourished children and young people. Soup or porridge was served as school food. In the 1950s-1970s, the school taught a lot of crafts. After the wars (Winter war 1939-1940, Continuation War 1941-1944 and the Lapland War 1944-1945), approx. 40% of the clothes were sewn at home and the clothes were carefully worn out. There was a shortage of fabrics and old clothes were sewn for children. In 1964, only 12% of clothes were made at home, and in 1975, 8%. In the 1950s, the making of rugs, which had been at a standstill during the war due to a lack of materials, began to inspire again. (Vanha-Similä 2020.)

The grammar school offered girls more opportunities and it was felt to enable a better future for the children. The popularity of the grammar school grew and in the 1970s already more than half of the age group attended it. In the 1970s, the transition was made to basic education, which guaranteed the same level of education throughout Finland until the age of 16. The pupils started studying English in the third grade. (Vanha-Similä 2020.) Basic education contains general education during nine years.

Before the basic school reform in Finland in the 1970s, not all families were enthusiastic about educating girls. Teachers were very important encouragers, and relatives could financially support studies. After the fourth grade, there was a grammar school entrance exam, where the student could fail due to too much excitement. In the 1950s, the entrance exam assessed only knowledge of the mother tongue and mathematics. It started at the age of 10-13 and training courses were organized for the applicants and guides were published. Some of the homes received private tuition for their children so that the certificate would have been as good as possible. There were local differences in Finland, and not all schools organized entrance exams. Some of the students went on to high school studies. (Vanha-Similä 2020.)

3 The Teaching Granny -project

The project was divided into four parts: preparation, planning, the project in practice and finally, writing the report.

3.1 Preparation

As a classroom teacher, I already had knowledge about the importance of motivation for learning, as well as I had information and experience about how to teach pupils to speak, listen, read, and write.

There is concern about the position of the Finnish language among the world's languages. Social interaction, motivation and private tutoring are the main themes of the book, the focus of which is reading, reading comprehension and writing. The topics become concrete when the author starts implementing the Teaching Granny project.

Literacy is the basis of all learning and the development of thinking skills. After explaining the concepts related to speaking, listening, reading, and writing, the book introduces the stages of the Teaching Granny project. Part 1 emphasizes the importance of reading aloud. by proceeding from history to theories and further to practical skills. Part 2 presents reading comprehension theories, reading strategies, research and supporting S2 students. Part 3 focuses on writing by stating the current situation and presents theories and research. Part 4 is a reflection chapter. The author reflects on her experiences as a Teaching Granny.

The appendices present the content of the project in both English and Finnish, give instructions to support writing and mention good habits.